



A New Life

Tony Spitzberg and Emily Mayer, 7th Grade Humanities
Innovations Academy, San Diego, CA

“How can we tell an interesting story that helps people understand our community?” was the essential question that drove the creation of the student-produced documentary, *A New Life: A 7th Grade Video Journalism Project*. Students began by researching the countries of the refugees and immigrants that they would be interviewing at La Maestra Community Health Center, an organization that assists refugees and immigrants who are new to the United States. The students then analyzed the techniques of professional interviewers, formulated interview questions, conducted interviews and studied video editing to produce the film. They held a premiere of their powerful documentary for a large audience, and saved the front row for the subjects of their film who attended as the evening’s special guests.

Teacher Reflection

What began as interest from students to produce a documentary of familiar people in their lives quickly morphed into something much more profound: a desire to tell the stories of others with very different backgrounds from their own. The students sought to explore and understand the challenges these individuals experienced in an attempt to seek a better life. Students transformed into photographers, interviewers, authors, journalists, sociologists, researchers and documentarians as they sought answers. Their film—the culmination of countless hours of research, practice interviews, and editing—became secondary to a deeper understanding and appreciation for the plight of those who come to America in search of a new life.

Student Reflection

I want people to watch our documentary and take away how lucky we are. There are a lot of people in other countries who don’t have nearly as many opportunities as we have, as much stuff as we have, and as much education as we have. We can really do great things with the opportunities we’ve been given in our country.

—Julia